

Blocking of F. D. R.'s Anti-Inflation Plan Provides Ammunition for Defeatists

[This is the first of two articles.]

By Rose Wortis

The defeat of the President's 7-point anti-inflation program in the last Congress has brought great hardships on the working class population in our country. The rapid increase in the cost of living, the heavy burdens of taxation, especially the 5 per cent victory tax, have seriously undermined the living standards of our people and have given rise to mass discontent.

These difficulties have been seized upon by the defeatists in the labor movement, particularly John A. Lewis, to discredit labor's win-the-war policies and precipitate strikes which are particularly menacing during the present decisive period of the war.

Mr. Lewis has assailed the program reached by labor, industry and the government immediately after Pearl Harbor and called the 15 per cent figure "an arbitrary and miserably stupid formula" that "chains labor to the wheels of industry." (Excerpt N. Y. Herald Tribune, Feb. 4, 1943.)

The dangerous character of this campaign is best illustrated by the widespread publicity given to Lewis' statement in the defeatist press, which shows a new and deliberate incitement to strike action. Thus we see the *World-Telegram*, not very noted for its friendship to labor, showing a sudden concern for labor in its editorial of Monday, Feb. 8. The "*Telegram*" as much as endorses Lewis' stand against the responsible leaders of labor

whose policies are based on winning the just demands of the workers through strengthening the economy of the nation—the main aim of Lewis and his defeatist friends of the *World-Telegram* is to weaken and disorganize the economy of the nation and bring confusion and demoralization into the ranks of labor.

This defeatist propaganda covered with demagoguery is particularly dangerous, because of Lewis' association with militant struggles of the past, and because of a certain amount of uncertainty among some of the old-time union officials as to the role and functions of trade unions in war time.

The January issue of the *International Teamsters' Journal* carries an article written by its international representative, Joseph M. Casey, who describes this state of confusion very sharply. Mr. Casey says:

"In the past years union agreements expired and negotiations automatically followed. Not so today! This basic right faces just a nominal existence. A dozen and one war directives have blown the old order to bits, with the bits forming only a muddled-up mass to be sorted and rearranged into the picture once known as collective bargaining. . . . Union representatives, befuddled and perplexed, move blindly, falteringly and often defectively in the general direction of the goal which, until recently, was always plainly visible and easy to attain. . . ."

Mr. Casey correctly points out that if the union leaders do not find their way to a new approach to the problems they face, the consequences will be very serious to organized labor. He asks, "Are we big enough to do the job and save our members and our unions? I think we are. If we are not, then we should get out and make room for men who are."

Let us examine some of these misconceptions spread among the workers to discourage and demoralize their organized efforts and cause apprehension as to the future of the labor movement. Is it true, as some of the so-called friends of labor say, that under present conditions the functions of trade unions are disappearing? Just the contrary is the case. The need for unions is more basic than ever before both from the point of view of the interests of the war and the economic conditions of the workers.

Comrade Browder in his pamphlet, "Production for Victory," shows how closely related is the battle for production and the state of trade union organizations; only where trade union organization exists can workers really make their maximum contribution to production. Labor-management committees have been most successful in such plants where workers through their union can act as an organized force. This is substantiated not only by the unions but also by industrial engineers. It is no acci-

dent that war production plans under union contracts, such as the General Electric plants, have made the most distinguished production records.

Now, as to the economic conditions of the workers, it is true, as Casey says, that the old form of collective bargaining with the threat of strike action cannot be used by labor in the war emergency, but, in its place, labor has helped to establish the War Labor Board on which it is directly represented through its own spokesmen. If there are weaknesses in the functioning of this board, it is only due to insufficient organized pressure of the labor movement to correct them.

It was the steel workers' union through its organized effort that brought about the formula of 15 per cent increase in wages to make up for the increased cost of living—a ruling which resulted in wage increases affecting thousands of workers. Today, on the basis of the rise in the cost of living, trade unions have taken up the fight for revising the "Little Steel" formula in line with the increased cost of living. In making this demand labor is not seeking to exploit the present situation to its own advantage. It is merely fighting against the deterioration of the living standards of the workers and for real economic stabilization in the interests, not only of labor but the whole nation.

The organized labor movement has won other important victories of a fundamental character in the

past period, such as the Labor Board ruling on equal pay for women. Although equal pay for women had been a demand of labor for many years, only the increased strength and prestige of the labor movement in the nation has definitely established the principle of equal pay for equal work for women. It is true that we did not win this demand through strike, but the victory is no less important and probably more general applying to all industries. Labor will still have to fight to realize this principle in life.

Labor has made more progress in eliminating discriminatory practices against Negro workers than it has made in the past decade. Testimony of this we saw at the historic AFL conference attended by 300 Negro delegates with Negro trade union officials representing basic war production unions sitting side by side with their white brothers on the platform at a conference in the deep South.

Labor has won widespread recognition of the union maintenance clause which served as a serious blow to company unionism—without any resort to the strike.

Yes, the trade unions have served the workers and the nation well during these times of stress. Labor has been most outstanding in supporting the war policies of President Roosevelt against the appeasers. Trade unionism has won acclaim and much wider recognition among other sections of the population.

(To Be Concluded Tomorrow)